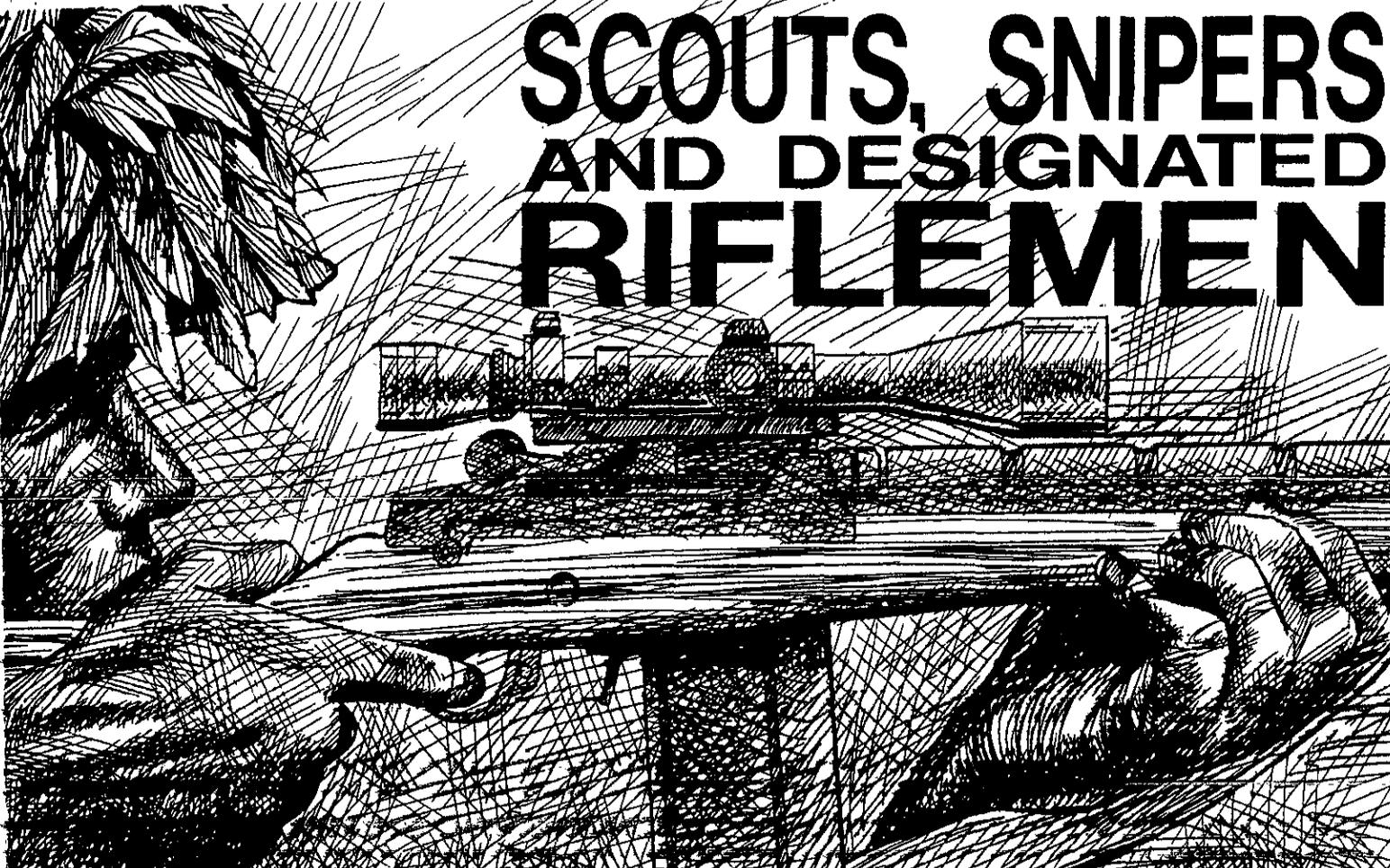


# SCOUTS, SNIPERS AND DESIGNATED RIFLEMEN



SERGEANT FIRST CLASS JOHN E. POLBY

Marksmanship seems to have been rediscovered in the Army in recent years, and we certainly need for our soldiers to be proficient with their rifles. But we also need some soldiers who surpass the marksmanship standard—who, by inclination, training, and desire, gain an uncommon mastery of the rifle—to serve as scouts, snipers, and designated riflemen.

A scout must be an expert rifleman, but one who uses the utmost discretion in firing his weapon. His primary concern is reconnaissance, and if he fires at an inopportune time, he fails in his mission. At the same time, if he fails to fire or cannot bring rapid effective fire on the enemy, he may be captured or killed.

A sniper also wants to remain unseen and he, too, uses discretion in firing his weapon. The primary difference between him and the scout is that the sniper goes out to kill the enemy, deliberately and selectively. "One shot, one kill" is his motto, goal, and philosophy. He and his observer work as a team.

A designated rifleman, although not officially recognized by the Army, has been an unofficial member of the infantry squad for a long time. (According to the NCOs who trained me, every squad had one or more during the Korean and Vietnam wars.) He is an individual soldier who is known to have great skill with his assigned weapon, either alone or coached

by an observer with a spotting scope or binoculars. He can be of any rank in the squad, so long as he can place precision rifle fire on a target.

These three soldiers share similar skills. Expert fieldcraft is essential for scouts and snipers and important for the designated rifleman. All three must have high personal standards of marksmanship and initiative. All three must have exceptional self-discipline and patience. In addition, the designated rifleman must understand the mission, the commander's intent, and the rules of engagement, so that he can take decisive action or respond instantly to orders. (The scout and the sniper will probably not have anyone to tell them what to do.)

Their training is basically the same as the training for all infantrymen, but the following areas are of particular importance to them:

**Marksmanship.** A sniper must be skilled in advanced marksmanship techniques, and a scout must be able to react quickly and accurately to chance contact. A designated rifleman must train constantly to make every shot count and to do his job with the least amount of ammunition. (It is unrealistic, however, for him to try for one-shot kills, especially on bunkers.)

**Camouflage.** A sniper must know how to remain undetected



until he has made his shot and can escape. A designated rifleman and a scout must be able not only to camouflage their positions but also to recognize camouflaged enemy soldiers and emplacements.

**Movement.** A scout has to learn to move quietly and to leave as little sign of his passing as possible, and it is healthy for a sniper to do likewise. A designated rifleman must quickly determine, and move by, a covered and concealed route to a position from which he can best help his unit accomplish its mission.

**Tactics and Order of Battle.** A scout can relay information better if he knows what he is seeing. Studying the enemy's tactics and order of battle enables him to place priorities on targets for the snipers and for artillery and air support. A sniper can use this knowledge to find and kill lucrative targets, and a designated rifleman can use it to look for and kill leaders, in both the offense and the defense.

**Communications.** A scout must be able to get accurate information through at any cost, and the same applies to the sniper in his secondary mission of scouting. A sniper must also be able to communicate in case he runs into trouble, and a designated rifleman must be able to communicate to his chain of command what he sees through his binoculars or scope.

**Weapon, Vehicle, and Aircraft Identification.** A scout must have accurate information, and a sniper must also be highly proficient in this task so he will know where to look for leaders or key personnel. A sniper must also know the weak points on weapons, vehicles, and aircraft so he can destroy them. Disabling a truck or radar with rifle fire to give aircraft

or artillery a sitting target may be more effective than just shooting a few senior officers. To a lesser extent, this also applies to the designated rifleman.

**Mines and Booby Traps.** A scout and a sniper must be vigilant in looking for mines and booby traps, not only for self-preservation but for the good of the mission. Both must also be expert at setting and concealing mines and booby traps to provide early warning or to cover a withdrawal.

**Fire Support.** Scouts and snipers must master the skills of forward observers in directing both aircraft and artillery, because they are employed separately from their parent organizations and rarely have a fire support team available. Both can often be in a position to direct effective fires on an enemy force. Snipers also have the means to pin down an element or delay and disrupt its efforts to disperse. By disabling the lead vehicle in a convoy at a choke point, for example, a sniper can provide a lucrative target for air support or artillery. While these same skills are nice for the designated rifleman to have, they are not critical, because he normally operates within squads and platoons that have fire support teams available.

There is one difficulty with the training of scouts and snipers: Snipers, under current doctrine (Training Circular 23-14), are provided by the scout platoon in an infantry battalion. Unfortunately, though, the scout platoon is not given any additional men.

It would be far more effective to beef up the scout platoon with a separate sniper section of seven or eight men. It is true that both the scout and the sniper need to be expert shots and experts at fieldcraft, but I believe that the one significant dif-

ference between them will create a problem: A scout is trained to observe, while a sniper is trained to kill enemy targets.

A scout must remain inconspicuous and fire only in self-defense or during selected missions—such as counter-reconnaissance or when screening the flank of a unit—to slow an enemy and gain time for that unit. When he must fire, he must be skillful at firing quickly and accurately on single or multiple close-in targets.

A sniper, on the other hand, must be trained and motivated to kill with his rifle. He must be dedicated to an uncompromising standard of selecting targets and firing on them accurately at long range.

I believe the current plan will create a hybrid "scout-sniper" who has grave psychological problems: If we tell a man in the morning to remain undetected at all costs and in the afternoon to concentrate on shooting somebody, we run the risk of ending up with a scout who fires when he shouldn't and a sniper who doesn't fire when he should.

## SNIPER WEAPONS

When it comes to weapons for the scout, the sniper, and the designated rifleman, several are suitable.

The M21 sniper system—an accurized M14 with the selector lever removed and fixed to operate on semi-automatic—is still with us. Although it is capable of excellent accuracy, it has been criticized for its loss of zero with the scope removed. The men in my company, after some training with the company's M21, soon found, however, that they could hit type "E" silhouette targets at 800 meters with iron sights or with the ART II scope.

The new M24 sniper system is a much-modified version of

the commercial Remington Model 700 sport rifle. The M24 boasts a synthetic stock and a 10-power scope, and its caliber can be changed from 7.62mm to .300 magnum. It is a superb weapon for making selective, deliberate kills at 1,000 meters or more. Its maximum effective range depends on the caliber chosen and the skill of the sniper.

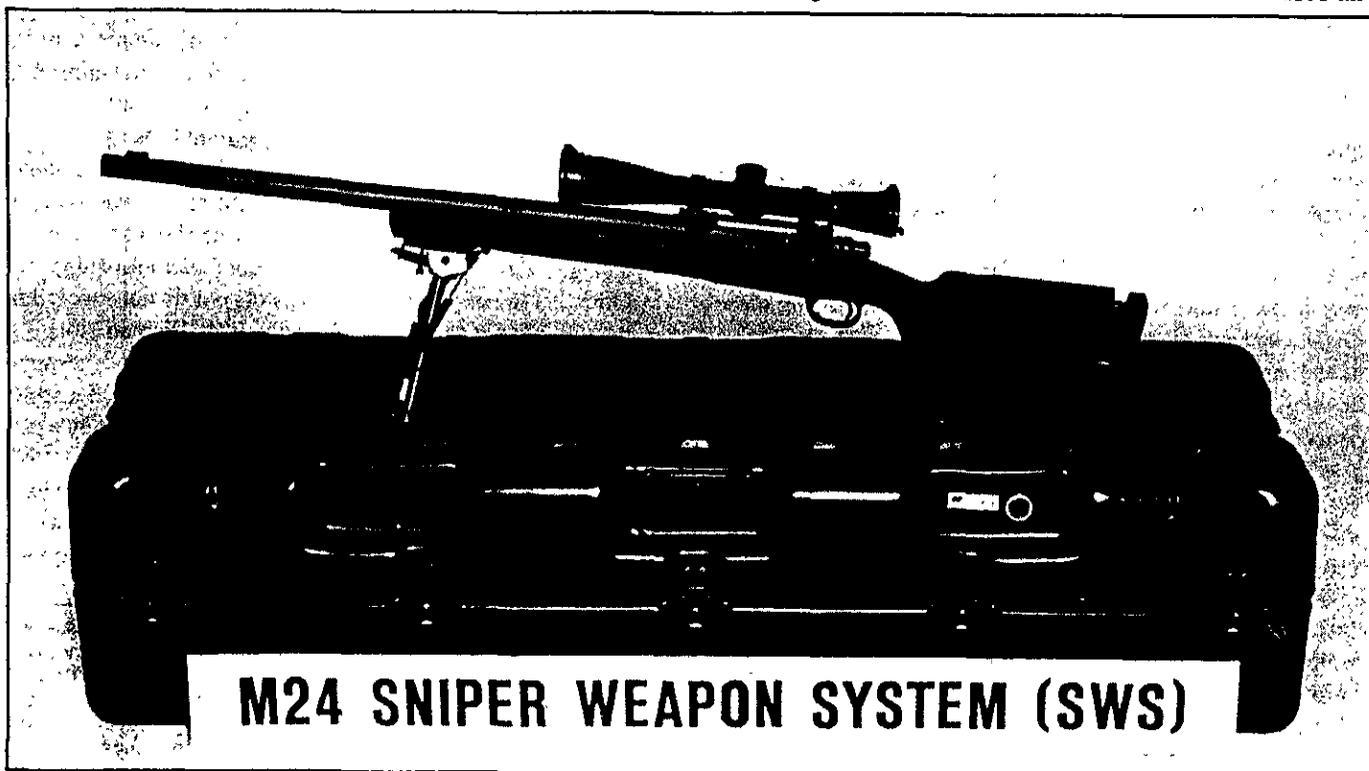
This system does have weaknesses, though, the most glaring of which is its lack of firepower. The rounds must be loaded singly into the magazine, and this can be ticklish under some conditions. In addition, the iron sights are separate from the rifle and therefore easily lost, broken, or left behind.

If a sniper is working alone, the rifle's lack of a magazine capacity will be a serious problem in some situations. Fortunately, though, he usually has a partner who is carrying the M16A2, and this is one of the most accurate semi-automatic small arms in existence.

Firing with my company at a Marine Corps known distance range with an M16A2 fitted with a Leupold 4-power compact scope and using M885 ammunition, I found I could keep 10 shots in a three-inch circle at 300 meters and do it consistently.

The point is that a service rifle fitted with an optical sight and fired on semi-automatic that will put 10 shots into a circle three inches in diameter at 300 meters is accurate enough for sniping.

Working with an observer, a sniper can use the M24 to kill leaders (or anyone with initiative) while the observer keeps pesky individuals or small groups from flanking him or rushing across a choke point. This will enable the sniper to make a large number of kills in a short time and then disappear. (This is not my idea but a tactic used by a Marine Corps gunnery sergeant in Vietnam. He would pick off leaders and radio telephone operators with a Remington 700 bolt-action rifle at close range—300 to 400 meters—while his observer used an



M14 to provide other fire as necessary.)

The M21 with a good zero on the scope is no slouch either. Ranger snipers in Grenada made kills on 120mm mortar crews at ranges of more than 1,000 meters. While not in the same league, the sniper team in my company (with a MILES laser device on the M21), overwatching a critical bridge 300 meters from its position during our battalion's external evaluation, engaged and destroyed an opposing force (OPFOR) infantry platoon with a combination of sniper rifle fire and mortar fire. The platoon, unable to move because of the sniper, was an easy target for the battalion's 81mm mortars. And despite the M21's loud report with blanks, the OPFOR platoon was not able to locate the sniper position a mere 300 meters away and bring effective fire onto it. The OPFOR soldiers later said they were surprised that a sniper system had been used against them.

While these stories provide food for thought and demonstrate that a sniper team will be well served with either an M24 or an M21, there is also another weapon that is suitable for sniping—the Barrett "Light Fifty"—a .50 caliber shoulder-fired semi-automatic sniper rifle that weighs 32.5 pounds and is usually fired from a bipod. Firing this weapon offhand, I have easily put two shots into a large target (8 feet high, 10 feet wide) at 1,300 meters.

The recoil was pleasant, thanks to its short recoil system, not as bad as firing an M1200 12-gauge riot gun with slugs. For those soldiers who can handle it, though, new dimensions of sniping are possible—defeating light to medium cover at long range, for example, or securing long stretches of open terrain, such as airfields. In mountainous terrain, bunkers that would be impervious to almost anything would be nothing but targets for .50 caliber armor-piercing incendiary rounds.

The Barrett's ammunition is fed by 11-round magazines, and there is no getting around the fact that .50 caliber ammunition is heavy. Still, the gains can be worth the cost. The weapon and ammunition can be broken down into several man-pack loads, and a soldier can move a weapon this light just about anywhere he wants it. This does not mean we should all run out and use the .50 caliber for everything. But this is a special weapon with great potential, and we should not ignore it.

Another weapon associated with sniping is the M9 9mm automatic pistol, which gives a sniper a fast-handling close-in personal defense weapon. It would be more useful to a sniper if a sound suppressor were added to it. A sniper could use it to break out of an encirclement, for example, or deal with somebody who stumbled onto him. A knife is quiet, too, but a sniper may get shot trying to use it. I, for one, would be far happier shooting an unsuspecting soldier in the back from 25 meters than risk being shot at three meters while playing "Rambo."

For scouts, who also need to remain discreet and quietly kill an enemy if necessary, a Colt 9mm submachinegun with suppressor might be better. Since scouts move more than snipers do, they need a weapon with more immediately available range and firepower than a pistol will provide, and it is very accurate. Another advantage is that its silhouette is not

significantly different from that of the M16A2, and its operation and maintenance are almost identical.

A disadvantage is that it would reduce the squad's long-range firepower, since one man would be carrying the machinegun instead of a rifle. The squad's short range firepower would not be significantly hindered, though, and the silencer would be invaluable.

A designated rifleman, unlike the scouts and snipers, has to be proficient in shooting quickly and accurately at close range as a member of his squad or platoon, or of placing precision fire on a target at long range. To do this, he does not need any unusual weapons. His issue M16A2 will suffice.

What he does need, though, to make him more efficient and versatile is a small, rugged, optical sight for the rifle. Although a scope will not make him a better shot or make the weapon any more accurate, it will allow him to place his aiming point more precisely on a target. With a properly zeroed optical device mounted on his M16A2, he should be able to hit a target as small as a man's head at 300 or 400 meters. He should also be able to find and suppress bunker apertures at ranges that would make them invisible to the naked eye.

In low-intensity conflicts, combat in cities, or even mid- to high-intensity conflicts, if we could make it unsafe for a tank commander to stick his head up, we could then force him to "button up." The enemy would be afraid to look around a corner in cities, and guerrillas would never know (until it was too late) that their stream crossing site was under observation.

Despite our increasingly technical world, it is the man with the rifle who still settles most of today's conflicts. Technology does us no good if we cannot kill or capture the enemy.

Scouts are not snipers, and designated riflemen are not snipers. Snipers can perform the missions of both scouts and designated riflemen, but this is not the best way to use snipers.

All three can and should function as a team. The snipers, using the scouts to find targets and report, can move in from another direction, kill, and leave, while the uncompromised scouts continue to track the enemy and set him up again. The designated riflemen can use their accurate fires to confuse the enemy as to the number and locations of the actual snipers.

Since we expect losses in combat, the scouts who shoot well enough, and the designated riflemen who shoot and move well enough, will also provide a pool of candidates for sniper slots. Other soldiers who try for these slots but do not succeed may be suitable for the scout or designated rifleman slots.

Used together, this trio of scout, sniper, and designated rifleman can significantly increase a unit's combat effectiveness. A single well-placed bullet, whether delivered by a sniper or a designated rifleman, is an intensely personal way to kill and to die. With that bullet, we send the message to the enemy that not only can we find him, we can also kill him. We can make the U.S. rifleman of today the most feared weapon on the battlefield.

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Sergeant First Class John E. Foley recently completed an assignment as S-2 NCO of the 4th Battalion, 22d Infantry, 25th Infantry Division and is now a platoon sergeant in the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry in Korea. This is his ninth assignment as a platoon sergeant, having also served in that position in Ranger, light infantry, and mechanized infantry units. Several of his articles have been published in INFANTRY.

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